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UNCLAS TEGUCIGALPA 000298

SIPDIS

STATE FOR WHA/CEN, EB, DS, AND INR  
STATE PASS TO USTR  
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SUBJECT: LARGE BUT PEACEFUL TEGUCIGALPA PROTEST COMES OFF  
AS EXPECTED: ANTI-GOH, ANTI-FREE TRADE

REF: TEGUCIGALPA 236 (NOTAL)

1. As promised, the leftist organization Popular Block held a large protest march February 5 in Tegucigalpa, and a smaller protest in San Pedro Sula. The protest also included temporary morning road blocks on main highways near major cities in several parts of the country. The largely peaceful protests (some graffiti and minor property damage) included approximately 3-5,000 demonstrators total (most in Tegucigalpa). The mood was anti-GOH and focused on controversial domestic issues linked to the recent IMF agreement, as well CAFTA and FTAA. The march ended at the Presidential Palace; there was no demonstration outside the Embassy.

2. In a new twist, some journalists joined the protests to decry a recent guilty verdict in a defamation/slander case against a prominent journalist. A dispute over what percentage to increase the minimum wage is still outstanding, and was only a minor issue for protesters.

PALMER